



Pitts, F. H. (2019, Apr 30). What does the future of work look like?
University of Bristol.
<https://templequarter.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/2019/04/30/what-does-the-future-of-work-look-like/>

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via University of Bristol at <https://templequarter.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/2019/04/30/what-does-the-future-of-work-look-like/> . Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

What does the future of work look like?

Frederick Harry Pitts, Lecturer in Management at University of Bristol.

The future of work: you can't move for mention of it today. Consultants, academics and policymakers all present a single, fast-approaching point of change.

With automation, artificial intelligence and algorithms, we could be facing a utopia or dystopia — depending on who you talk to. For some, this means freedom from mundane tasks with luxury at the click of a button. For others, it's the worry of losing purpose as technology takes over our jobs and eventually the world.

The jury is well and truly out on how this will unfold. Estimates vary wildly as to how many jobs are at threat, with PWC suggesting some third of jobs at risk and OECD predicting a less severe one in ten. Of course, the effects of this would be felt differently across roles and sectors. But overall, things are very unlikely to be as extreme as people imagine.

What unites both utopian and dystopian visions is the idea that technological change is inevitable. Both agree we must adjust our expectations of what work can and should be like in the future. But this doesn't mean it's out of our control. What is clear is that the future of work will be characterised by technology changing how we approach things, instead of simply taking our jobs. And this will need careful management and oversight by business leaders, policymakers and workers' representatives.

The human element

The future of work isn't just a question of technology, but also of humanity. It's important to recognise that social, political, legal and geographical processes will determine how all these changes play out. This means that the future of work will depend on how people and organisations are configured in different places. And it means that we as humans, together with our institutions, can ultimately decide and control what the future of work will be like.

Maybe it's better to speak of futures of work rather than a singular imminent future. It's not just how technology reshapes working practices that's at stake. But also the forms of management, governance and ownership best equipped to deliver a better world of work for everyone. It's not enough to look at these futures of work, whether good or bad, through a one-sided technical or scientific lens. We need an interdisciplinary approach together with the study of society, organisation, political economy, law and culture.

Practicing what we preach

At the University of Bristol, we're already working across disciplinary boundaries to get to grips with this. You can see it at the New School of Management through the Faculty Research Group for Perspectives on Work, and in the Bristol University

Press online magazine Futures of Work. And we're also considering how education and training can challenge current practices to encourage new ways of thinking. But in all of this, it's important to include perspectives from wider communities at the coalface of the changes underway in the world of work.

The new Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus will provide a state-of-the-art infrastructure to host this — bringing together social scientists and engineers in one space to work together on the big challenges facing us. It'll boost our existing work with the businesses and social enterprises already innovating at the edge of the futures of work. But it'll also encourage new discussions with a wide range of stakeholders on key topics. From the costs and consequences of the changing world of work to our human capacity to control the futures contained within, we'll be part of the conversation.